

## Sunday School

### THE TRIAL OF PETER AND JOHN

Acts 4:5-20.

January 31, 1909.

**GOLDEN TEXT.**—"They were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness."—Acts 4:31.

#### SHORTER CATECHISM.

Q. 40 What did God at first reveal to man for the rule of his obedience?

A. The rule which God at first revealed to man for his obedience was the moral law.

#### DAILY HOME READINGS.

M.—Acts 4:1-12.

T.—Acts 4:13-31.

W.—Luke 21:5-15.

Th.—Dan. 3:8-18.

F.—1 Cor. 3:1-11.

S.—Matt. 21:33-44.

S.—2 Tim. 1:1-12.

#### TOPICAL OUTLINE.

##### The Outburst of Persecution—

Peter and John arrested, vs. 1-4.

Tried before the Sanhedrim, vs. 4-14.

Threatened, but not silenced, vs. 15-20.

#### LESSON COMMENTS.

In chapter 3 the lame man was healed. The wonder created astonishment, and the apostles were explaining the occurrence. They ascribed all the glory of it to Christ. While they were thus magnifying Jesus and proclaiming his resurrection, suddenly there came upon them the priests and rulers and the captain of the temple. Peter and John under arrest go to prison and the long war of the new dispensation is begun. God could make the flowers grow in the shade; he could make the fruit mellow in the darkness, but it pleases God to rear flowers and fruit in the sunlight. Exposed to summer heat and fierce winds flowers and fruit develop. It is so in the kingdom of grace.

"Must I be carried to the skies

On flowery beds of ease?

No I must fight if I would win."

Looking at it after the manner of men, now that it is all over, the Jews did the very worst thing for their cause. Had they only known it, it would have been better for them not to have touched these two apostles. The arrest of Peter and John and their public trial was equivalent to setting them on a stand whence they proclaimed the gospel with great power. The truth is, Satan always defeats himself. In countless instances persecution only advances a cause. Just as the rough winds cause young trees to take deeper root and make them tough and strong, so persecution strengthens God's people and becomes a blessing instead of a curse.

Leaving out the effect on Peter and John, we see that the arrest gave them an audience which they could not otherwise have had. The Sanhedrim was composed of the wealthiest and noblest of all Jews. They were the representatives of the pride and religion of the whole race and now behold them seated in deep solemnity. It was a court which for dignity and learning and religion, as the Jews understood it, had no superior anywhere. Peter and John stood in the midst. The Sanhedrim sat in a semi-circle. It was evidently the plan of the council to put these men to death for violating the requirements of the law as found in Deut. 13, and so they put the question, "By what name have you done this?" Any timidity on the part of Peter and John would have been their ruin. Jesus had prom-

ised the Holy Spirit to his people when they should stand before kings and princes, and that promise is now fulfilled. Under the fullness of the Holy Ghost Peter at once proclaims the fundamental doctrine of Christianity, the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In an instant the parties in this famous trial were reversed. Peter and John, instead of sitting meekly under the accusation of the council, became the accusers of the whole body and the seventy men who sat dressed in the garb of judges now took the rank of accused men.

The boldness of Peter and John fills us with astonishment. They were ignorant of fine language, of rabbinical traditions, of the cunning tactics of lawyers and to the eye of man the contest between them and the council was altogether unequal. Any one would say that the time had come for these men to be crushed. But God, who gave Elijah nerve to stand before Ahab, inspired these men with the same heavenly courage. They had convictions and they charged the rulers with crucifying their own Messiah. The main leaders of the body were Sadducees. Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John and Alexander were all Sadducees. They did not believe in the resurrection of the dead, nor in any angel or spirit or the immortality of the soul. When Peter and John therefore proclaimed the resurrection of Jesus Christ it was a center shot. When Jesus contended with the Jews his main opposers were the Pharisees, because Jesus constantly rebuked formality. When the apostles began their work, their opposers were chiefly Sadducees, because the chief point in apostolic preaching was the resurrection of Jesus. We can readily see therefore that the issue in the trial of Peter and John was fundamental, the opposition diametrical.

The first charge of Peter, viz., that the Jews had crucified Jesus, the Sadducees knew was true. The resurrection of Jesus Peter proved by the lame man. Here was a miracle that no human power could accomplish. If Jesus were dead he could not have given life and energy to the lame man: a dead Christ can not be the author of life. Here was the man before them. Into his withered limbs, life and healing had come. Such could not have come from the mouldering body of a dead Christ. Therefore Jesus is alive, and if he is alive he must have risen from the dead, for he was crucified, dead and buried.

The men of the council were doubtless familiar with the legend of the stone which the builders rejected, but which afterwards became the head of the corner. David and Isaiah had both spoken of this stone. It was hewed out from the distant quarries by a master hand. The builders at first found no use for it, but by and by it became the chief corner stone. Locked in its grip the adjoining walls stood firm and on it the whole building rested. None other stone could take its place. Whoever deliberately or blindly rushed against it would surely be broken. On whomsoever that stone should fall it would grind him to powder. To the men of the council Peter says, "Jesus of Nazareth is that stone. God sent him to the world to be the one foundation of the church. He is competent to hold in unity all the stones of the building. This Jesus you have rejected, but there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved." Long years afterward (see 1 Peter, 2:7-8) Peter writing to the dispersed Jews takes up the figure of this rejected stone and again applies it to Jesus: "Unto you which believe he is precious, but unto them which be disobedient he becomes a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence."

This later utterance of Peter, spoken under the weight of years, when he was mature and mellow, carries us back at once to the critical hour in his young manhood, when before his angry countrymen he spoke of Jesus as the rejected stone. Peter's whole ministry was unified by the gospel of Jesus as the living stone. To you which believe he is precious. To you that believe not, he will be a burdensome stone, a gin and a snare, upon whom many shall stumble and fall and be broken